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TAGS: PREL KMCA PGOV EAID PHUM GA

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: GOTG DEFENDS ITS RECORD FOLLOWING MCA SUSPENSION

REF: 06 BANJUL 717 ET AL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (SBU) On February 23, the Embassy received a letter, dated February 13, addressed to Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) CEO Danilovich from the Gambian President's senior adviser, Secretary General Elizabeth Harding. In the letter, Ms. Harding asserts that the GOTG is "perplexed" over the Millennium Challenge Corporation's June 2006 decision to suspend The Gambia's eligibility for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) program due to slippage in the GOTG's performance on various eligibility criteria. Attached to the letter is a lengthy statement challenging the negative trends and associated data on the criteria that prompted the suspension. (The letter and attachment are being faxed to Department, AF/W, and MCC; originals are being pouched to MCC.) Although in the letter the Secretary General conveys the GOTG's desire to "set the record straight" regarding its performance on the MCA eligibility criteria in question, the attached statement fails to address the areas of policy slippage in any convincing way.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: The letter and attachment follow a November 2006 letter from the Secretary General's office to the Ambassador advising that the GOTG "is no longer interested in pursuing the MCA criteria" or otherwise consulting on "MCA matters" (reftel). That earlier letter came in response to Ambassador's notification to the GOTG that The Gambia had not been re-selected for MCA eligibility for FY 2007 due to its suspension, but that the Embassy remained at the GOTG's disposal on steps it could take in pursuit of reinstatement. Judging from the defiant, defensive tone and content of this latest letter, the erratic and irascible President Jammeh remains as resentful as ever over the suspension and as yet unwilling to engage with us in any meaningful way on the reinstatement process. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD